



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Giardiasis

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis (gee-are-DYE-a-sis) is a contagious disease caused by the germ, *Giardia*, which is found in the intestines of many animals. During the past two decades, *Giardia* infection has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease in the United States.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Bloating
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Weight loss
- Dehydration

Symptoms usually begin within 1 to 3 weeks after being exposed and last 2-6 weeks. People with *Giardia* may carry it in their bodies for weeks or months without having symptoms and can infect others.

How is giardiasis spread?

Giardia is passed in the stool and people become infected by ingesting feces from an infected animal or person (fecal-oral route). Giardiasis is more common in children than adults. Large community outbreaks have occurred from drinking treated, but unfiltered water. Smaller outbreaks have resulted from contaminated food, person-to-person transmission in day care facilities, and contaminated recreational waters. Routine water treatments do not kill *Giardia*.

Who is at risk for getting giardiasis?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness.

How do I know if I have giardiasis?

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours should consult a health care provider. The health care provider may collect several stool samples before the tests are positive for *Giardia*.

How is giardiasis treated?

Treatment may not be needed, but a health care provider may prescribe medicine in some cases. People with giardiasis should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How is giardiasis prevented?

In general, to prevent giardiasis follow the guidelines below:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after assisting someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting, after swimming, as well as before, during, and after food preparation.
- Clean food preparation work surfaces, equipment, and utensils with soap and water before, during, and after food preparation.
- Separate raw and cooked foods.
- Do not consume unpasteurized dairy products or juices.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
- Avoid swallowing untreated water.
- Wash hands after contact with livestock, petting zoos, pets, especially if they have diarrhea.
- Have pets routinely checked for parasites by your veterinarian, especially if they have diarrhea.
- When traveling outside the United States:
 - Do not eat uncooked fruits or vegetables unless you peel them yourself.
 - Do not eat foods or drinks from street vendors.
 - Do not drink or eat local water or ice.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/gen_info/index.html.

Information on Healthy Water may be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/>.

This page was last reviewed May 6, 2013.